

110K more Chicago area-residents are working since 2010, but blacks lag behind

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Chicago's labor force has grown since the recession nearly a decade ago — with Latinos leading the way — but the area's African-American population hasn't benefitted as much as other groups.

Using U.S. Census Bureau data released this week, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning found that the number of workers 16 years or older increased to more than 5 million in 2017 — an increase of 110,000 workers since 2010. Even so, the share of people employed or actively seeking work dropped from 68.1 percent to 66.9 percent of the working-age population.

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A variety of factors contribute to a region's labor force rate, including unemployment levels, age and the number of people retiring and the migration of people into and out of the area, said Aseal Tineh, a policy analyst with the agency.

"There may be a smaller share of people who are able to work," Tineh said. "Pair that up with the unemployment rate, and the fact that some may have stopped seeking work all together, that factors into participation."

Hispanics' share of the workforce increased from 18.4 percent in 2010 to 20.4 percent in 2017. Although their overall labor force participation rate dropped 1.2 percent in that time, they still led all groups with a 70.6-percent participation rate. The Hispanic unemployment rate dropped two percentage points, from 10 to 8 percent.

Black residents of the Chicago area had the lowest participation rate among racial and ethnic groups with just 60.8 percent participating, the agency found.

Between 2010 and 2017, Chicago lost more than 89,000 black residents, census data shows. While the region's overall unemployment rate fell from 9 percent to 7.6 percent, black unemployment fell just .4 percent to 17.2 percent, by far the highest among racial and ethnic groups.

The agency's analysis also found that about 60 percent of blacks who left from 2012 to 2016 didn't have a job lined up. The majority in all other groups leaving the Chicago area left with a job in hand.

"This lack of employment has far-reaching effects on individual quality of life and regional economic success," CMAP's analysis said. The agency recently released a plan for the future, called "On To 2050," which has made "inclusive growth" a focus on adding economic opportunity across the demographic spectrum. Among the ways that could be achieved, according to CMAP spokeswoman Mandy Burrell, is through improved transportation and removal of barriers to employment.